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PROGRAM The Last Word

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SUBJECT Spies: Discussion by Bamford and Rositzke

GREG JACKSON: Get your questions ready, 'cause we'll be talking next about spies.

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JACKSON: Listen, before we rush on, let me say just a word about the phones. We've just -- we're flooded with calls and we'd like to take as many as we can....

Now, for the moment, spy stories, as you know, have been all over the news lately, especially the arrest of that British spy Geoffrey Arthur Prime, who may have given the Russians more American and British secrets than any spy in at least 20 years.

Now, meet a spymaster, in Washington, Harry Rositzke, a CIA operative for 25 years, most of them spent nose-to-nose against the Russians. You'll talk to him.

Also, in Pittsburgh, James Bamford, author of the book "The Puzzle Palace," about America's super-secret intelligence body, the National Security Agency.

Now, Mr. Rositzke, we've all read James Bond. The world of the spy seems so glamorous. Is that true?

HARRY ROSITZKE: The world of the spy is probably the most quiet and inconspicuous world you could imagine. People like Bond probably couldn't operate for more than a day or so because the local cops would be right on him.

The actual process of meeting a man secretly and also of getting to know him enough to recruit him as an agent has to be

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done with nobody else aware of it. Because if anybody knows anything is going on, that's the end of the spy. That's the end of the operation.

JACKSON: Well, sure.

How do we get spies? I couldn't help but notice -- and I know you've seen this advertisement -- and we have the CIA taking out classified ads. Have you seen the ad?

ROSITZKE: I have. But the people who are recruited by CIA, which is a rather large organization, are, for the most part, people who are going to do research work, statistics works, communications work, etcetera. And even those who go on to the operations end aren't spies. They are case officers. It's their job to go overseas and recruit spies on behalf of the U.S. Government.

JACKSON: I get your point there. I mean when you're a spy, what you're really doing is running the nationals in whatever foreign country you work in.

ROSITZKE: That's right. And the main point is that those people in Washington who are going to go overseas, they try to keep their affiliation with CIA secret. So when they go overseas, people don't say, "Ah, yes. You're from CIA."

Most of the people in CIA could perfectly well say, "I work in CIA."

JACKSON: There is always the technology. As you know, today it seems like the human element is disappearing. At least what you read.

Mr. Bamford, in Pittsburgh. Your book "The Puzzle Palace," can you just tell us very briefly about the technology in modern-day spying?

JAMES BAMFORD: Yes. The technology is very, very advanced. The major technological agency is the National Security Agency. It's America's most secret agency, and also its largest spy agency. The Senate Intelligence Committee, in 1975, said that the CIA represents less than ten percent of the American intelligence capability. The largest and most influential member was the National Security Agency.

What they do is they monitor communications, they pick up signals that go through the air, the telephone calls, telegrams, telex messages, messages between Soviet aircraft and bases, Soviet military bases and their units in the field, that type of information. In addition, there are satellites in the

sky between a hundred miles up and 22,000 miles up that pick up signals, communications signals, and also take photographs that have a resolution down to six inches.

JACKSON: You know, it would seem to me, with all of that technology, but really there's got to be a human looking at it all. Somewhere I read that agency generates 40 tons of documents a day. Could that possibly be true?

BAMFORD: Well, it is true. That was the result of a congressional committee that that figure came out. In addition, I think it was the General Accounting Office did a study of the National Security Agency. They actually studied all the intelligence agencies and tried to determine how many classified documents were produced each year by each agency. And they got a figure from each agency. And when they came to the NSA, the National Security Agency, they virtually just threw up their hands because they couldn't come to an accurate figure. They just estimated that it was somewhere -- that the NSA classified somewhere between 50 and 100 million documents a year. And they said that that was a greater number than all the other documents in all the other agencies, the CIA, the Pentagon, the State Department, and all other agencies put together.

JACKSON: Okay. Now I'd like to go to the phones, put you on the air. You're talking to a former spy in Washington.

MAN: This question is directed to the representative from the CIA.

Sir, you may have answered this question already, but I'll ask it anyway. Is the CIA actively engaged in recruiting men and women for the purposes of conducting covert operations designed not to gather intelligence, but rather to influence the course of political events in foreign countries?

ROSITZKE: It's my impression that in the last ten years, or at least certainly in the last eight years, the CIA has concentrated more and more on espionage work. As you know, in the mid-seventies a great many criticisms were leveled at its covert operations, its paramilitary and political operations. But my impression is they still have a capability for political operations, which would in effect mean they could take political action in any country in which the President thought it might be desirable.

JACKSON: Mr. Rositzke, may I just jump in here a minute? What is a spymaster? We asked that we call you that.

ROSITZKE: Well, I tell you, the trouble with the usual reference to CIA operators as spies is it confuses the whole

issue. The spy doesn't go abroad to recruit a spy. The spy is always a foreign national. In our own terminology, we refer to ourselves as case officers, operations officers, whose job it is to recruit a spy.

JACKSON: Okay.

ROSITZKE: So the spymaster is pretty colloquial, but at least it differentiates between a spy and the master who recruits him.

JACKSON: Okay. I understand.

Now let's go to the phones.

MAN: I'd like to know, to the former CIA agent, does the CIA need more freedom from controls to be more effective?

ROSITZKE: I'll have to hear that again.

JACKSON: The caller's saying, are you shackled? Is the CIA -- are there too many regulations surrounding it?

ROSITZKE: Well, that was the impression, I think, that was gained in the late '70s. But the impression I get from the people I know -- and that is, CIA is able to do all those things it's supposed to do, and that the restrictions are really very, very minor.

JACKSON: Okay. One more call.

MAN: I've always heard it said that we spy, you spy, it all comes out in the balance. And I was just wondering, is the balance equal?

ROSITZKE: I'd like Mr. Bamford to answer that.

What about the Russians? We have all these antennas. Mr. Bamford?

BAMFORD: Yes, they have their share. As a matter of fact, one of the major Russian listening posts is in Cuba. From Cuba, the Russians can pick up virtually all the international communications entering and leaving the United States every day. In addition, the Russians have listening posts in Eastern Europe listening on Western Europe and so forth. So it's pretty much an equal draw.

JACKSON: Okay. If you two gentlemen will stay right there, we'll be right back with more questions.

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JACKSON: We're talking about the world of spying. Our guests, former CIA spymaster Harry Rositzke and author James Bamford.

Both of you are Americans, and I don't want to put you on the spot. But just let me ask it straight out. What country in the world has the best espionage system?

ROSITZKE: You have to measure by the job given to the espionage service. And in terms of what the KGB does for Moscow, there's not much question it is the most efficient espionage system in the world, even though one has to allow for the high quality of something like the Israeli service, which has much more limited purposes.

JACKSON: Mr. Bamford?

BAMFORD: Well, I think, depending on which technology you're talking about, I think the United States is far superior to the Soviet Union in satellite and computer technology. And those are the main ingredients in making and breaking codes and eavesdropping. So I think the United States comes out a bit ahead in that department.

In terms of human intelligence, I think Mr. Rositzke could probably answer better on that question.

JACKSON: Okay. But let me go to the phones and see.

MAN: ...Does the CIA have its own military force, or does it borrow from each of the services, the Navy, Marines, Army, whatever?

ROSITZKE: I'll need that again, too.

JACKSON: He's asking if the CIA has, actually, its own secret army, so to speak.

ROSITZKE: The CIA, so far as I know, over these years, has never had its own secret army. It has had for about 25 years the capacity to train what we call paramilitary personnel in operations. But the CIA itself neither has an army nor a secret army.

JACKSON: Let me ask you this, sir, while I have you. Why are the Russians so successful -- at least there in England, it seems -- in planting these so-called moles, spies that go underground and stay there 10-15 years? Do we have the same thing that's just not as publicized?

ROSITZKE: We don't have that same capacity. You

realize, for example, there are 300 KGB officers in New York right now. There are over 200 in Paris and London. Their job is to spend all the time they can getting to meet what they call purposeful acquaintances, people that they might cultivate and who already are in a job with access to classified material.

JACKSON: And that just might be the price of a free and open...

ROSITZKE: That's right. We cannot do that in Moscow, Prague, or Warsaw.

JACKSON: Let me go to the phones.

MAN: This is for James Bamford. I was wondering how the NSA goes about recruiting their members.

BAMFORD: Well, they recruit on college campuses. They have a big recruiting facility at Fort Meade in Maryland. That's the NSA headquarters. In addition, they have a recruiting office in Boston and a recruiting office in Atlanta, Georgia. Those are the only two recruiting offices outside of Maryland. But they recruit from a lot of engineering colleges, and they want mathematicians and electronic engineers and people who are fluent in exotic languages. It's a very technical-oriented agency and they look very much for engineers.

JACKSON: Sir, may I ask you this? Are they up front when they approach a college kid? Do they say, "Look, we're recruiting spies"?

BAMFORD: Well, I saw a number of their brochures. The brochures didn't tell anything about the agency in terms of the fact that it did espionage. It's changed a little bit in the past year or so. But what the brochure would say will be that the NSA protects American communications, which is one of its functions, but not its prime function. Its prime function is -- its largest function is eavesdropping. And it makes no reference of that.

I think they've changed it just in the past year or so.

JACKSON: Okay. If you'll both wait right there, we're going to go to a commercial, and we'll be right back.

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JACKSON: You are talking to experts on spying. On the left there, Harry Rositzke in Washington, a former CIA agent and spymaster. On the right, James Bamford in Pittsburgh, probably knows as much about the National Security Agency as any writer in the country today.

Let's go to the phones. You're talking to the spy experts.

MAN: My question is, isn't it true that books by ex-agents and programs like this overglamorize the spy business, and it's really a lot of basic collecting of files and reading newspapers and manuals?

JACKSON: That's a good question.

Mr. Bamford, do you have any reservations about revealing the information you did? I understand the government isn't too happy with your work.

BAMFORD: Well, that's an understatement, I think.

I have no reservations about it. My research was entirely in the public domain. I obtained information under the Freedom of Information Act, going through congressional documents, interviewing former senior NSA officials. And I didn't have any secret co-conspirator handing me documents out the back door.

JACKSON: Sir, let me ask you this question. Right now, would you publish the name of an agent?

BAMFORD: I would publish the name of an NSA employee. I don't consider him an agent. And my book is full of the names of NSA people. The NSA has never really considered their employees to be covert agents. They're technicians. So I've never really had any compunction of not publishing that.

JACKSON: Mr. Rositzke, let's get to this subject. As you know, journalists have published names. However, in reading more, I understand it hasn't caused the physical harm that we thought in as many cases.

ROSITZKE: Well, over the years -- and when we talk about agents, I mean foreigners who are working for us -- there have been seven occasions in which at least their identity in general, if not their names, have been placed in newspapers. That is the worst crime anybody can commit.

Now, there is a new law now where anybody who divulges the names of case officers, of CIA personnel overseas, with malice, with the purpose of seeing to it that their efficiency, or perhaps even their lives, are affected, that's now a felony.

But in general, I would say that the exposures, particularly of the last ten years, have stopped short of endangering anybody else's life.

JACKSON: Okay. I'd like to go to the phones. You're talking to an expert on spying.

MAN: I'd like to know if, from Mr. [unintelligible], if they think the CIA actually gets more and better information today through the technology than it did many years ago without it.

BAMFORD: Yes, it definitely gets more and better information. Before, if you wanted to find out if they were building new submarines in Vladivostok, you would have to recruit an agent to go there, photograph it with a Minox camera, and try to get the information back. Today you can have a satellite that flies over there three times a day photographing all the new equipment being put on the submarine. So you get a great deal of information.

The problem is that a lot of times there is too much information, and it takes human beings to have to sift through that information. So you might find out about a new Middle East war, but it might be two days after the war started when you find out about it.

JACKSON: Mr. Rositzke, you really -- is it fair to say you really kind of come from the old school of human-to-human spies? What do you think of all this new technology?

ROSITZKE: Well, the espionage service, the American intelligence service part of CIA is strictly a human-intelligence profession. And in the course of the years, the basic aims have changed as information from other sources, particularly technology, satellites, etcetera, have come through.

Thirty years ago I had to get trained men, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Russians, sent by air into the Soviet Union to determine whether or not they were preparing a military action against us. Today, after all the satellites, before that the U-2, today we can keep track of what's going on physically inside the Soviet Union almost every minute of the day.

So, to me, that is the greatest advance, and it's taken a great burden off the human operators, who now have to get into things like foreign office files, military research laboratories in the Soviet Union, into the foreign intelligence services working against us. So our focus is narrower, but follows exactly the same techniques that have been used for a hundred years.

JACKSON: All right. Both of you, thank you so much.